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ABSTRACT

An argument is made for continued and strengthened programs in foreign language instruction in business curricula. Among the points made are the following: economic and commercial development in post-World War II America established strong international ties; the Vietnam War emphasized U.S. inadequacies in cultural literacy; some higher education institutions are beginning to understand the importance of internationalizing academic programs; the U.S. workforce lacks international or intercultural competence; and 95 percent of the world's population is unlike that of the United States. Increased international commerce, mutual understanding, and accelerated scientific progress are among the benefits of improved language skill development. Implications of the report, "A Nation at Risk," are discussed briefly. It is suggested that foreign language educators must advise students of the long-range benefits of language study on business careers and must also be willing to adapt foreign language courses to accommodate the needs of business students. Recommendations for state action are offered, including making international education a part of the basic education of all students. The proposed Foreign Language Economic Enhancement Act is described and supported. Contains 17 references. (LB)

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"FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: CASE FOR SURVIVAL"

American Association for the Advancement of Core Curriculum, Atlanta

October 8-11, 1992

Michael D. Buzash

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Foreign Languages and International Studies:

Case for Survival

The era following World War II was a period of unbelievable economic foreign aid and non-military, commercial productivity in the United States. This great demand contributed to industrial production, high employment, prosperity, and economic expansion. The American people enjoyed the return to a peace-time economy that produced housing, automobiles, appliances, and certain growing optimism. The United States' industry converted from enormous military demands to that of growing popular consumption. The incessant productivity created jobs and growing staff salaries, through numerous labor crises with labor salary and benefit gains. Agricultural productivity also rose with increasing exportation of its bountiful harvests grown in desirable natural conditions.

Although the rapid industrial conversion and the growing labor supply forced decisions in a peace-time economy, the abundance of personnel and materials, cheap energy, and ample investments did exist. There had been no war destruction of U.S. land, industry, or railroads, no foreign occupation of its mainland, no drain on its financial resources as yet, and nearly no limitation of its wealth potential. The human will endured and survived. The huge war debt did not prevent further commitments in the re-building of Europe and Japan both economically and financially. The U.S. remained the big producer, exporter, and financier of the world.

The economic, commercial development during the post-war era established strong ties with many countries through U.S. interests. American companies invested abroad and eventually European or Oriental companies became more and more involved in the U.S. business, commercial world. A stable political system, dependable banking institutions, and a strong dollar offered incentives to a foreign entrepreneur. Foreign investments in the U.S. and American investments abroad were common and productive. We were selling to a world who sought U.S. products. American ingenuity, inventiveness, quality, and marketing, were envied and admired. American labor was more and more aggressive and lucrative. Its stamp on a product was a status symbol. We basked in an economic bright sun while competitive dark clouds were approaching.

During the many years of the Cold War Western Europe, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and others were quickly becoming competitors. Prosperity, dependable working force and high ethics for productivity and quality were their codes. Yet despite our deep commitment and continuous belief in the principles of the United Nations, our many financial obligations, or our diplomatic involvements, etc., few events influenced our public officials and educational leaders to support overtly teachers of foreign languages in their mission of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and language competence.

During the sixties the foreign language profession established a new methodology, proclaiming a march toward oral proficiency with unprecedented enrollments due to the baby boom.

In the seventies the enrollments tumbled, and the Departments of Social and Natural Sciences, English, and Administrators upheld and supported the drop of the A. B. requirements on many campuses, and an attitude of anti-traditional establishment was proclaimed academically and scholastically. Budgets became more restricted and foreign language departments were forced to retrench and survive defensively in isolation.

The Vietnamese War involved us in a region with which we had had very little contact or understanding. The oil embargo focused our attention toward the Middle East, another region hardly known, identified, or understood by most American people. Latin American and African crises mounted and political instabilities taxed our national attention. It was becoming increasingly evident that the U.S. was involved in world crises that brought their immediate influence into our daily lives.

Despite our commitments or involvements we were not developing either a populace or an elite who would be adequately prepared to understand issues, manage our international affairs, or cope with future problems or their resolutions. Americans were becoming painfully aware that our schools were not graduating students with knowledge of the geographical identification of the world, or with a historical relation to the past. As a whole Americans were linguistically inadequate, ill-prepared, and culturally illiterate about people of other cultures. For too many years in the post-atomic bomb Age emphasis had been placed on the math-science studies and were devoted to technological superiority in armaments and their

increased production and to excelling in exploration.

These concerns were not new. In 1958 the National Defense Education Act sought to reduce the shortage of Americans with sufficient training in foreign languages. Although there were progress and initiatives, certain needs had to be solved if Americans were to achieve minimal competence in foreign languages and area studies. Congress refuted the appeal to fund the International Education Act. The academic establishment could not provide employment for many of the graduates of the National Defense Education Act programs. Again in 1979 President Carter's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies upheld the same ideas and arguments on this country's security. Increasing American incompetence in foreign language training was declared the basis for the "dangerous inadequate understanding of world affairs" (Dale, 18).

Today there is evidence that appeals repeated in the late seventies are bringing about some modest changes. Through the efforts of some educators, administrators, congressmen, private foundations and public officials to internationalize educa..., an increasing number of undergraduates are reflecting some results (Ibid., 19). University and college faculties in the U.S. are beginning to understand that internationalizing academic programs is not only fashionable, but also long overdue (Christensen, 27).

Technological advances are worldwide. The U.S. does not dominate the latest interdisciplinary disciplines. Scientists and engineers in many countries are making eminent discoveries

and setting higher technological standards. "Internationalization" of curricula in engineering, science, business, and health professions must be a continuous process (Christensen, 28). The proclamation of an international mission must go beyond faculty members and current students. National professional organizations and associations can provide an effective stimulus for internationalizing professional curricula.

In this era of global competition American multi-national organizations must recognize the harsh reality that our workforce also lacks international or intercultural competence (Stone, 429). As national trade boundaries continue to diminish, it becomes increasingly apparent that U.S. firms need managers who are not only well-versed in global economics, but are also informed about the context in which international business decisions are conducted and concluded. Any broad-based solution to this problem must include an increased focus on internationalizing our educational system (Copeland, 22-23).

An essential element of the business curriculum should be the constant exposure of the students to the international dimension of business throughout their academic studies (Stone, 429). This view was reflected in the curricular standards and requirements established by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business. Nevertheless, the approach adopted toward internationalization of the business curricula, excepting a small number of schools with specialized international business foci, embraced virtually no specific consideration or encouragement for the study of foreign languages or training.

Among findings two are of particular interest: 1). both foreign language and business faculties agreed that traditional foreign language course offerings do not enhance the needs of business students; 2). business faculty oppose language requirements for business students on the grounds that the business curricula are already filled with area requirements, and foreign languages are not important enough to be included in the curricula relative to core business skills.

About 95 percent of the world's peoples are not like the citizens of the U.S. in language, culture, heritage, thought patterns, and approaches to world issues (Smucker, 10). Internationalization of the curriculum is not just a liberal arts responsibility; it also involves the professions and the entire institution--faculty, students, administration, and support staff. To function more adequately as individuals and as a nation in this competitive world, it is imperative that we find strategies that will work as we attempt to establish the international education that is essential for both the average citizen and the specialist in the years ahead (Ibid., 10).

Again and again we stress what seems so obvious: that increased international commerce, greater mutual understanding, accelerated scientific progress, and a more liberal, humanistic education clearly result from our ability to communicate with our international brothers and sisters (Cooper, 14). According to Henry R. Cooper, "humanity is rushing to embrace one language, English, for international commerce and communication. Foreign nations reserve their own languages essentially for domestic

communications. Perceiving all this, local school boards, college deans, and others who set education policy find themselves evermore hard pressed to commit their dwindling resources to expensive, labor-intensive foreign language programs when English can serve their students' foreign contact needs quite well" (Cooper, 14). This is very short thinking and provincial. Opportunities for intensive foreign language study can be highly beneficial and can prepare one to cope adequately with both foreign colleagues in international settings and with competitors involved in international trade. In addition to the cultural enrichment, linguistic awareness and sensitivity, it serves the nation's needs in commerce, diplomacy, defense, and education. Cooper concludes that "since we Americans have convinced or compelled the world to use English, and in the process both turned our Mother Tongue into a valuable national resource and given ourselves a tremendous advantage over those who speak the language less well than we do, are we not being excessively pragmatic" (Ibid., 14)?

We are weak <u>strategically</u> (Ibid., 14). The state that cannot follow the internal discussions of its neighbors has political and military disadvantages. On our tiny planet all states are now neighbors. The state that seems to be imposing on a neighbor its language and all the cultural concomitants of language--literature, song, press, the very modes of its political discourse and thinking--inevitably irritates and occasionally alienates that neighbor. The state that cannot conceive of modes of discourse other than those it conducts in

its own language is spiritually impoverished. A state that practices linguistic imperialism abroad reaps the bitter harvest of linguistic narrow-mindedness at home (Cooper, 14).

We are weak economically (Ibid., 14). It is not merely a matter here of failing to conduct a sale because of linguistic and cultural awareness. Rather we must face the inevitable consequences of being out of touch with much of the world until the world presents us in English its latest achievements pleasingly marketed and advantageously priced. Thanks to the universality of English and the impact of American culture, the world knows us far more profoundly than we know the world. Consequently, we have opened to our foreign competitors the avenue to sell to us efficiently. At the same time because we do not study their languages or their ways, we have eliminated ourselves from competing on their home turf. We threaten to destroy the free world's trade, upon which hangs the prosperity of all. The fault does not lie with the system that is not flawless, nor with extraordinary foreign business acumen. Costly American labor is not to blame, nor is undue American acquisitiveness (Ibid., 15).

At least one cause must be singled out for our relatively poor performance in the arena of international commerce. Through our insistence on English as the only language to be mastered for commercial discourse, we have laid ourselves bare to the world's most aggressive business people. At the same time we have refused to learn our competitors' languages and ways, thereby drawing a veil over their vulnerabilities. Somehow this cycle

must be broken without destroying the complex mechanism of the world economy in which it is currently embedded (Cooper, 15).

Contact with foreign languages comes late in the careers of most of our students. The majority of students apply to college without any foreign language training. Universities must begin to establish entrance requirements for foreign languages. These requirements should require some measure of genuine competence as well. For those who prove interested and competent, the system should provide a means of arriving at true proficiency. There need to be meaningful rewards for foreign language competency in the marketplace. Language competency must become a criterion for corporate advancement; language skills must be recognized, respected, and used, including government employees and military personnel. We must be prepared to deal with people as we find them (Ibid., 16).

The celebrated report, A Nation at Risk, 1983, emphasized that achieving proficiency in a foreign language ordinarily requires 4-6 years of study and should be started in the elementary grades; however, one starts where one is. Some college students, professional students, and university faculty members are first exposed to foreign language studies during undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate work.

The language skills needed to compete in the single European market must be taught along with business and technical skills. The pro-active policy supported by European Community initiatives included access to full-time language training and partnership between business and education in the design of a linguistic

infrastructure for commerce.

Project 1992, the Single Market Act, that will lift all trade barriers between the 12-member states of the European Community (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom) needs to be included in the college curriculum.

If foreign language educators are to attract substantial number of students, they must mount a substantial program of advising and educating students to the potential long range benefits that such study may have on their future business careers (Stone, 436). This campaign must take place ideally in cooperation with business school advisors and faculty, and certainly before their junior year.

It is important that foreign language educators who wish to attract business students must be willing to adapt foreign language courses to accommodate the needs of this group of potential students. The adaptation must go beyond the mere creation of specialized upper division language courses for business majors. Also a sustained educational advising effort along with adaptation of methods and content of foreign language courses are essential so that second language competence can be an attainable and relevant goal for every business major who desires to pursue it (Ibid., 436). Facts that support curricula adaptation are: 1). language needs of the graduates entering the business world are essentially oral/aural as contrasted with reading/written language needs of the natural and social sciences; 2). the international business person needs more

thorough cultural orientation; 3). international competition for business requires that graduates have competent skills to deal with the interaction of language and cultures in their careers; 4). individuals' aural-oral skills must be of high quality to obtain employment; and 5). the audience for such courses in the business schools is quite large.

Constant monitoring of the international trade situation and upgrading of the curriculum, use of community resources, maintaining a balance between specific business applications of language and general proficiency, follow-up from graduates, etc., all contribute to a clear picture of the actual situation and the potential developments at the University levels.

It is essential that points concluded by the Task Force on International Education be stressed here:

More than ever, U.S. economic well-being is intertwined with that of other countries through expanding international trade, financial markets and investments. National security and even world stability depend on U.S. comprehension of and communication with other countries. Therefore, internationalization must be an integral part of the education of every student. State governors must assume the lead in creating an international focus for the U.S. educational system at all levels.

The following objectives for state action are recommended: 1). international education must become part of the basic education of all students; 2). more students must gain proficiency in foreign languages; 3). teachers must know more about international issues; 4). schools and teachers must be

aware of the wealth of resources and materials that are available for international education; 5). all college and university graduates must be knowledgeable about the broader world and conversant in another language; 6). business and community support of international education should be increased; 7). the business community must have access to international education, particularly, export markets, trade regulations, and overseas cultures.

The J. Patrick Dale wrote: "By making the world temporally smaller, technology is making the context of American public life, geographically larger and socially more heterogeneous (17)." One of 3 U.S. manufacturing jobs and one of the 3 acres of U.S. farmland are directly affected by the health of American trade (Ibid., 17).

There is cause for encouragement, optimism and even euphoria among those in foreign languages. During the past months members of the American Translators Association have been noticing growing interest by governmental agencies and corporation giants in translation and interpretation as a profession. For the first time the distinction between language learning, interpretation, and translation has been acknowledged by members of Congress through the Miller Bill, officially called the Foreign Language Economic Enhancement Act. Bill, H.R. 5442 was introduced by Representative Miller of Washington on June 8, 1992. It was co-sponsored by representatives Panetta, Emerson, Kopetski, Penny, Sangmeister, and Towns. Senator Simon, author of the startling book, The Tongue-Tied American, 1980, will soon introduce similar

legislation in the Senate. The Executive Director of the Joint National Committee for Languages, David Edwards, worked closely with Rep. Miller and his staff of the bill. The Miller Bill was introduced "to establish Federal grant programs to identify and address the foreign language needs within the United States for the purpose of enhancing economic competitiveness, ensuring national security, and promoting the national interest." Title I deals with foreign-language teacher recruitment; Title III with the lesser-known and -studied languages; Title IV with export education; Title II deals exclusively with grants to Institutions of High Education for Translators and Interpreters and the establishment of a council for the purpose of developing physical plant and interpretation facilities, instructor training, materials, curriculum development, internship, faculty development, and support in translation and interpretation certificate and degree programs (Krawutschke, 1). No less than ten million dollars will be available for fellowships to individuals to pursue education in the areas of practical interpretation and translation. This bill is truly a significant event in the history of translation and interpretation but also in the awareness of the importance of the teaching of foreign languages for the enhancement of global involvement and internationalization of the curriculum.

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